Written by Lee Wylie
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What is it about Panama that makes it such a hotbed of boxing talent?

Apart from producing numerous world champions, this small Central American country, with a population of 3.5 million people, has also delivered no fewer than four hall of fame members from it's talented breeding grounds - Ismael Laguna, Eusebio Pedroza, Panama Al Brown and most famously, Roberto Duran. They are considered the holy grail of Panamanian pugilism.

Later this month on Showtime we will have a chance to see yet another product of Panama's vast assembly line of super talent when Anselmo " Chemito " Moreno steps into the ring to defend his 118 pound title against Mexican challenger David De La Mora. Moreno had slipped under the radar somewhat by fighting mainly in his homeland and in Europe on obscure TV

channels; it was difficult to catch a glimpse of him outside of grainy youtube clips. He was quite possibly boxing's best kept secret.

Hopefully, this will no longer be the case as a result of his sensational American debut in December of last year when he completely outboxed Vic Darchinyan over twelve one sided rounds. Moreno's performance against Darchinyan really was a dissertation on the finer points within the sweet science. Sure, Darchinyan had lost fights before [even losing on April 6 against Shinsuke Yamanaka] but he was never quite been beaten like this. Darchinyan carries a certain menace with him, hence his nickname " The Raging Bull." He is an ultra aggressive fighter who throws many punches. It takes alot for a defensive fighter like Moreno to thoroughly outbox him and win a decision.

In all honesty, Moreno may have put on the finest display of standing in range, making an opponent miss and making an opponent pay, since James Toney's systematic counterpunching deconstruction of Iran Barkley back in 1993. It really was THAT good. There will be those who disagree and point to some of Floyd Mayweather's recent performances as being a better display of counterpunching. Sure, I agree, Mayweather is a sensational counterpuncher, but I believe Mayweather's forte lies more within his counterattacking ability. Mayweather, at his best, is able to read his opponent's intentions and - because of his supreme speed and reflexes - land something quickly before he is attacked himself. Mayweather does not allow his opponent to complete their offensive technique. Moreno on the other hand, reacts after his opponent has finished their technique. Moreno allowed Darchinyan to complete his offensive technique, only to neutralise it through slipping, parrying and ducking, and then landing a counter. Every piece of Moreno's offense was a reaction to something Darchinyan threw, rather than what Darchinyan was about to throw. Moreno's defense is there to set up his offense.

Moreno, a southpaw, spent the majority of the fight staying in the pocket with Darchinyan, who is also a southpaw. If you take a look at the fight, you will notice only inches of space between Moreno's right foot and Darchinyan's right foot. This is a clear indication of what Moreno's intentions were - to stand in range and counter. Everything Darchinyan tried in the fight was shut down. Throughout the contest, Moreno was pivoting counter clockwise on his front foot, always moving but never running. As a result, Darchinyan could never set himself. There were occasions when Darchinyan managed to get into scoring positions in close, but Moreno quickly positioned himself - standing side on with his left glove by his chin and his right elbow covering his body - so that Darchinyan's attacks were ineffective.

As the fight progressed, Moreno's skills became even more apparent. Moreno mixed up the intentions of his jab superbly - sometimes it was used to disrupt Vic's rhythm, sometimes it was

thrown as he slid off to the side and other times it was used as a range finder for his straight left hand. As Darchinyan became more frustrated and wreckless as a result of his elusive opponent, Moreno became more aggressive. He further imposed himself on Darchinyan by unleashing a ferocious body attack, a measure of Moreno's brilliance that he was able to land hard body punches while still making his opponent miss in close. By the later rounds Moreno really was putting on a clinic. There was more slipping and sliding but now we were seeing more in the way of combination punching. With Darchinyan not knowing what was coming next, Moreno was able to feint Darchinyan out of position and land clean shots at will.

While there were times during the fight when Darchinyan was outboxed and made to look silly through Moreno's superior skill, there were also times in the fight when Darchinyan was outfought and was left disheartened because of Moreno's superior will. Moreno displayed toughness and grit - showing that apart from being a superb boxer, he can also mix it up if he elects to do so.

It was not only the visual content of Moreno's work that stood out. The punchstat numbers at the end of the fight were startling to say the least. There was not much to separate them with regards to how busy both fighters were - Darchinyan threw 555 punches, to Moreno's 498. However, in terms punches landed, Moreno landed 216 total punches to Darchinyan's 101 - more than a 2-1 ratio. The mis-match continued in power punching. Darchinyan landed 68 of 304, while Moreno landed a mind blowing 113 of 172 for a 68% connect rate - 30% higher than the bantamweight average.

With the win, Moreno moved his record to 32-1-1 [11 kos]. The only blemishes on Moreno's record are a draw against Javier Tello and a split decision loss against Ricardo Molina. For the record, both of those fights occurred during Moreno's opening year as a pro and his only loss to Molina has been avenged twice since.

Even though Moreno is relatively unheard of outside of hardcore fans, he is from a scientific perspective, among the best technicians in boxing. Moreno is an extremely skilled fighter whose ability to analyse and dissect his opponent's strengths and weaknesses is first rate. Moreno is also one of boxing's most adaptive fighters. By taking in his opponents habits, he can adjust his own style in order to meet the requirements of any stylistic problems his opponent may present - his vast array of talent and ring intelligence go way beyond his 26 years.

With his slick southpaw style, Moreno will be a tough proposition for any bantamweight [and

beyond] in the world. Personally, I'd love to see him in there with not only the likes of Guillermo Rigondeaux and Abner Mares, but also with the likes of Nonito Donaire. Moreno's talent deserves to be matched with boxing's best. It may not be too long before he finds himself in most peoples pound for pound top ten. [I already have him there at number ten].

Moreno may not be to everyone's taste. Boxing fans of the Tony Zale - Rocky Graziano or Arturo Gatti - Mickey Ward mould may look at his low knockout percentage and frown. Admittedly, Moreno does seem like a fighter who will likely be admired rather than adored.

But for those pure boxing connoisseurs and aficionados out there, it does not get much better than watching Anselmo Moreno.

Comment on this article

Radam G says:

Moreno is a mellow, not so jiggy-wiggly "Sweet Pea" Whitaker. But I don't know if Moreno has the mental cockiness and mental bad-boyness of the greatest pure boxing southpaw a$$ of all times. Holla!

ali says:

He's a top 10 p4p talent but I wouldn't put him in my top 10 just yet.

brownsugar says:

didn't Nonaire walk this guy down in about 6 rounds??